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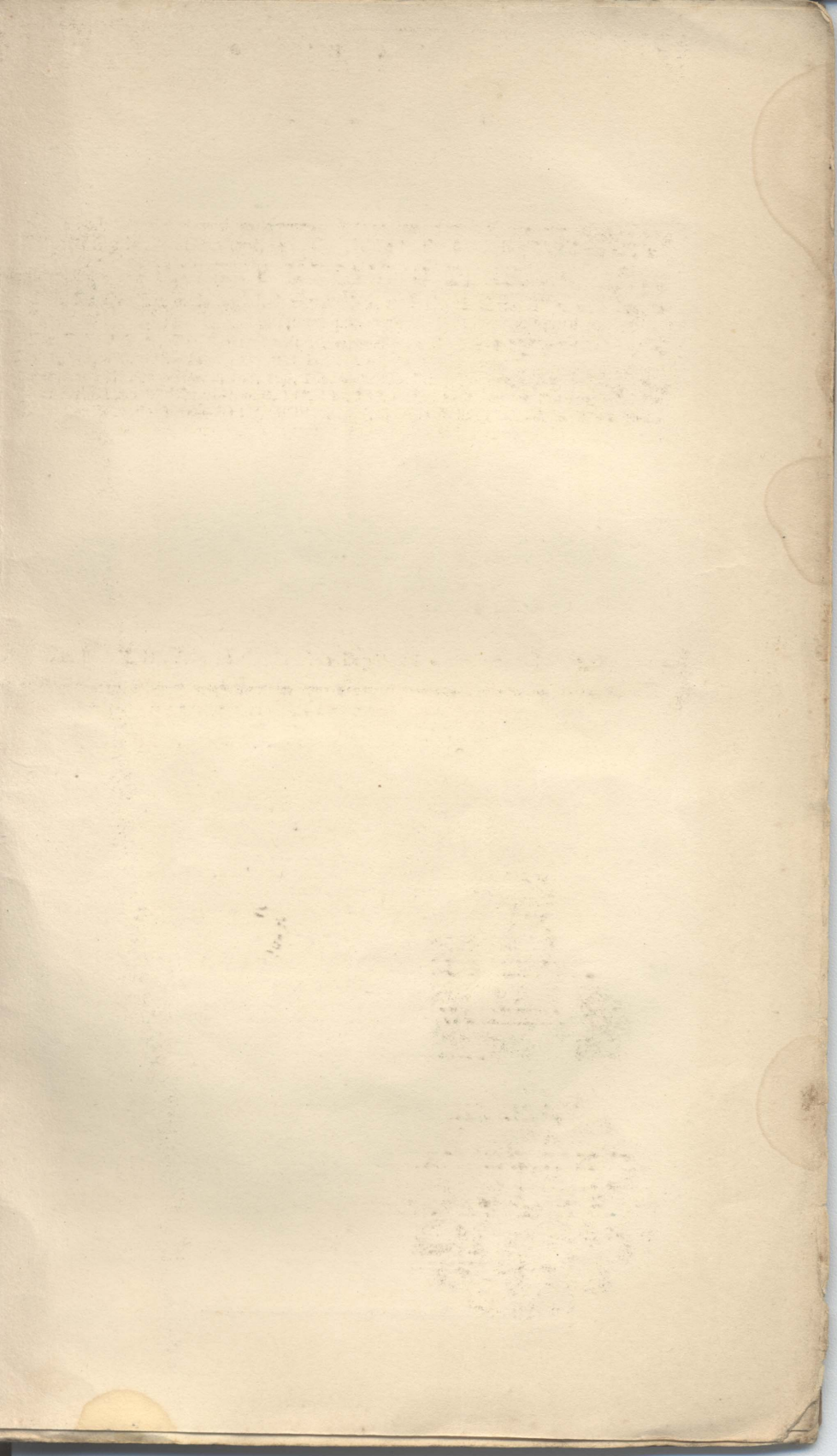
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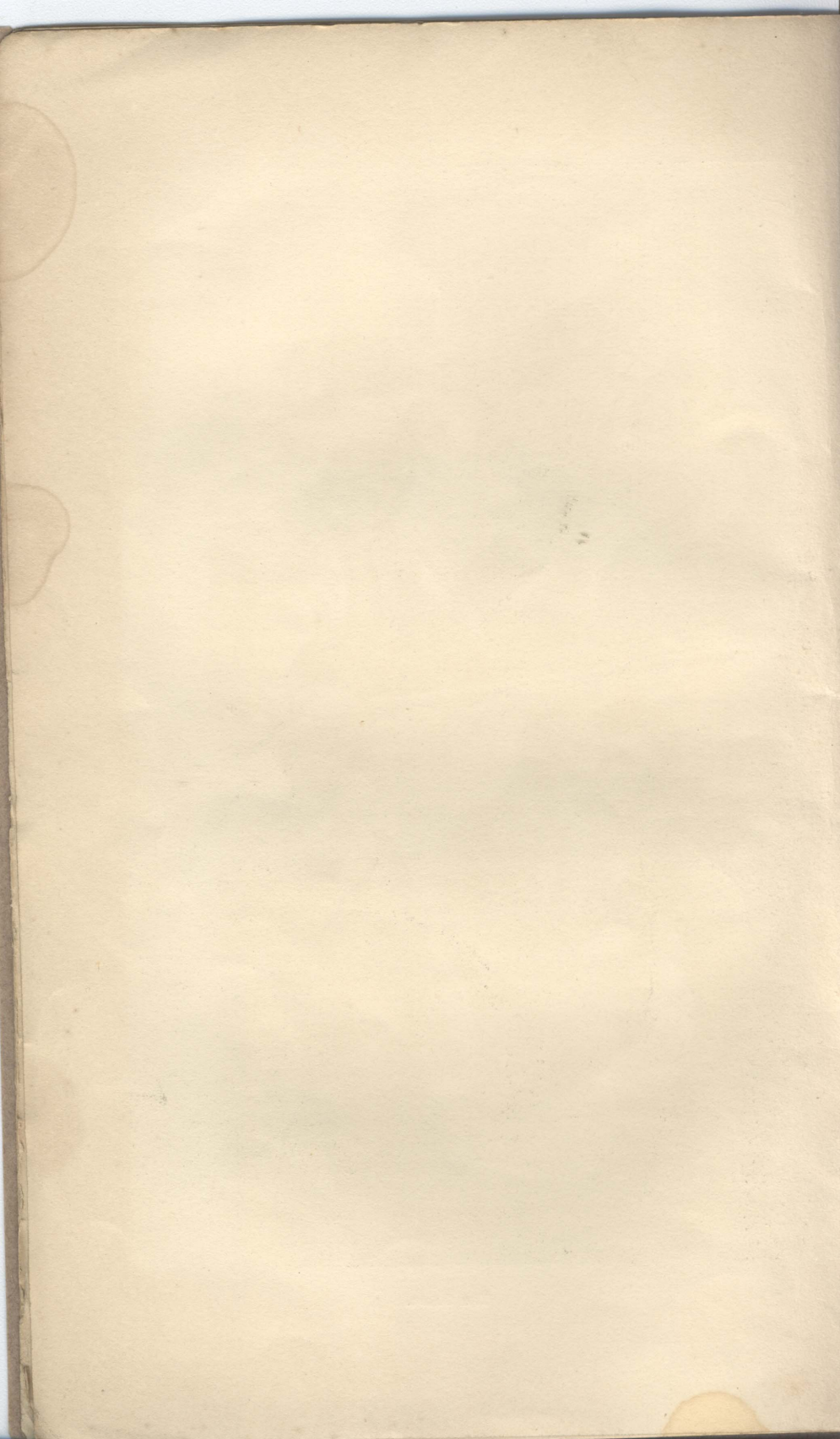
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The Court.







## CHAPTER XXI.

### THE STATE OF PUBLIC OPINION.

THE day of the trial was now quickly coming on, and the London world, especially the world of lawyers, was beginning to talk much on the subject. Men about the Inns of Court speculated as to the verdict, offering to each other very confident opinions as to the result, and offering, on some occasions, bets as well as opinions. The younger world of barristers was clearly of opinion that Lady Mason was innocent; but a portion, an unhappy portion, was inclined to fear, that, in spite of her innocence, she would be found guilty. The elder world of barristers was not, perhaps, so demonstrative, but in that world the belief in her innocence was not so strong, and the fear of her condemnation much stronger. The attorneys, as a rule, regarded her as guilty. To the policeman's mind every man not a policeman is a guilty being, and the attorneys perhaps share something of this feeling. But the attorneys to a man expected to see her acquitted. Great was their faith in Mr. Furnival; great their faith in Solomon Aram; but greater than in all was their faith in Mr. Chaffanbrass. If Mr. Chaffanbrass could not pull her through, with a prescription of twenty years on her side, things must be very much altered indeed in our English criminal court. To the outer world, that portion of the world which had nothing to do with the administration of the law, the idea of Lady Mason having been guilty seemed preposterous. Of course she was innocent, and of course she would be found to be innocent. And of course, also, that Joseph Mason of Groby Park was, and would be found to be, the meanest, the lowest, the most rapacious of mankind.

And then the story of Sir Peregrine's attachment and proposed marriage, joined as it was to various hints of the manner in which that marriage had been broken off, lent a romance to the whole affair, and added much to Lady Mason's popularity. Everybody had now heard of it, and everybody was also aware, that though the idea of a marriage had been abandoned, there had been no quarrel. The friendship between the families was as close as ever, and Sir Peregrine,—so it was understood—had pledged himself to an acquittal. It was felt to be a public annoyance that an affair of so exciting a nature should be allowed to come off in the little town of



Alston. The court-house, too, was very defective in its arrangements, and ill qualified to give accommodation to the great body of would-be attendants at the trial. One leading newspaper went so far as to suggest, that in such a case as this, the antediluvian prejudices of the British grandmother—meaning the Constitution—should be set aside, and the trial should take place in London. But I am not aware that any step was taken towards the carrying out of so desirable a project.

Down at Hamworth the feeling in favour of Lady Mason was not perhaps so strong as it was elsewhere. Dockwrath was a man not much respected, but nevertheless many believed in him; and down there, in the streets of Hamworth, he was not slack in propagating his view of the question. He had no doubt, he said, how the case would go. He had no doubt, although he was well aware that Mr. Mason's own lawyers would do all they could to throw over their own client. But he was too strong, he said, even for that. The facts as he would bring them forward would confound Round and Crook, and compel any jury to find a verdict of guilty. I do not say that all Hamworth believed in Dockwrath, but his energy and confidence did have its effect, and Lady Mason's case was not upheld so strongly in her own neighbourhood as elsewhere.

The witnesses in these days were of course very important persons, and could not but feel the weight of that attention which the world would certainly pay to them. There would be four chief witnesses for the prosecution; Dockwrath himself, who would be prepared to speak as to the papers left behind him by old Usbech; the man in whose possession now remained that deed respecting the partnership which was in truth executed by old Sir Joseph on that fourteenth of July; Bridget Bolster; and John Kenneby. Of the manner in which Mr. Dockwrath used his position we already know enough. The man who held the deed, one Torrington, was a relative of Martock, Sir Joseph's partner, and had been one of his executors. It was not much indeed that he had to say, but that little sent him up high in the social scale during those days. He lived at Kennington, and he was asked out to dinner in that neighbourhood every day for a week running, on the score of his connection with the great Orley Farm case. Bridget Bolster was still down at the hotel in the West of England, and being of a solid, sensible, and somewhat unimaginative turn of mind, probably went through her duties to the last without much change of manner. But the effect of the coming scenes upon poor John Kenneby was terrible. It was to him as though for the time they had made of him an Atlas, and compelled him to bear on his weak shoulders the weight of the whole world. Men did talk much about Lady Mason and the coming trial; but to him it seemed as though men talked of



nothing else. At Hubbles and Grease's it was found useless to put figures into his hands till all this should be over. Indeed it was doubted by many whether he would ever recover his ordinary tone of mind. It seemed to be understood that he would be cross-examined by Chaffanbrass, and there were those who thought that John Kenneby would never again be equal to a day's work after that which he would then be made to endure. That he would have been greatly relieved could the whole thing have been wiped away from him there can be no manner of doubt; but I fancy that he would also have been disappointed. It is much to be great for a day, even though that day's greatness should cause the shipwreck of a whole life.

'I shall endeavour to speak the truth,' said John Kenneby, solemnly.

'The truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth,' said Moulder.

'Yes, Moulder, that will be my endeavour; and then I may lay my hand upon my bosom and think that I have done my duty by my country.' And as Kenneby spoke he suited the action to the word.

'Quite right, John,' said Mrs. Smiley. 'Them's the sentiments of a man, and I, as a woman having a right to speak where you are concerned, quite approve of them.'

'They'll get nothing but the truth out of John,' said Mrs. Moulder; 'not if he knows it.' These last words she added, actuated by admiration of what she had heard of Mr. Chaffanbrass, and perhaps with some little doubt as to her brother's firmness.

'That's where it is,' said Moulder. 'Lord bless you, John, they'll turn you round their finger like a bit of red tape. Truth! Gammon! What do they care for truth?'

'But I care, Moulder,' said Kenneby. 'I don't suppose they can make me tell falsehoods if I don't wish it.'

'Not if you're the man I take you to be,' said Mrs. Smiley.

'Gammon!' said Moulder.

'Mr. Moulder, that's an objectionable word,' said Mrs. Smiley. 'If John Kenneby is the man I take him to be,—and who's a right to speak if I haven't, seeing that I am going to commit myself for this world into his hands?'—and Mrs. Smiley, as she spoke, simpered, and looked down with averted head on the fulness of her Irish tabinet—'if he's the man that I take him to be, he won't say on this thrilling occasion no more than the truth, nor yet no less. Now that isn't gammon—if I know what gammon is.'

It will have been already seen that the party in question were assembled at Mr. Moulder's room in Great St. Helen's. There had been a little supper party there to commemorate the final arrangements as to the coming marriage, and the four were now sitting round the fire with their glasses of hot toddy at their elbows.



Moulder was armed with his pipe, and was enjoying himself in that manner which most delighted him. When last we saw him he had somewhat exceeded discretion in his cups, and was not comfortable. But at the present nothing ailed him. The supper had been good, the tobacco was good, and the toddy was good. Therefore when the lovely Thais sitting beside him,—Thais however on this occasion having been provided not for himself but for his brother-in-law,—when Thais objected to the use of his favourite word, he merely chuckled down in the bottom of his fat throat, and allowed her to finish her sentence.

Poor John Kenneby had more—much more, on his hands than this dreadful trial. Since he had declared that the Adriatic was free to wed another, he had found himself devoted and given up to Mrs. Smiley. For some days after that auspicious evening there had been considerable wrangling between Mrs. Moulder and Mrs. Smiley as to the proceeds of the brick-field; and on this question Moulder himself had taken a part. The Moulder interest had of course desired that all right of management in the brick-field should be vested in the husband, seeing that, according to the usages of this country, brick-fields and their belongings appertain rather to men than to women; but Mrs. Smiley had soon made it evident that she by no means intended to be merely a sleeping partner in the firm. At one time Kenneby had entertained a hope of escape; for neither would the Moulder interest give way, nor would the Smiley. But two hundred a year was a great stake, and at last the thing was arranged, very much in accordance with the original Smiley view. And now at this most trying period of his life, poor Kennedy had upon his mind all the cares of a lover as well as the cares of a witness.

‘I shall do my best,’ said John. ‘I shall do my best and then throw myself upon Providence.’

‘And take a little drop of something comfortable in your pocket,’ said his sister, ‘so as to sperrit you up a little when your name’s called.’

‘Sperrit him up!’ said Moulder; ‘why I suppose he’ll be standing in that box the best part of a day. I knowed a man was a witness; it was a case of horse-stealing; and the man who was the witness was the man who’d took the horse.’

‘And he was witness against himself!’ said Mrs. Smiley.

‘No; he’d paid for it. That is to say, either he had or he hadn’t. That was what they wanted to get out of him, and I’m blessed if he didn’t take ’em till the judge wouldn’t set there any longer. And then they hadn’t got it out of him.’

‘But John Kenneby aint one of that sort,’ said Mrs. Smiley.

‘I suppose that man did not want to unbosom himself,’ said Kenneby.



'Well; no. The likes of him seldom do like to unbosom themselves,' said Moulder.

'But that will be my desire. If they will only allow me to speak freely whatever I know about this matter, I will give them no trouble.'

'You mean to act honest, John,' said his sister.

'I always did, Mary Anne.'

'Well now, I'll tell you what it is,' said Moulder. 'As Mrs. Smiley don't like it I won't say anything more about gammon;—not just at present, that is.'

'I've no objection to gammon, Mr. Moulder, when properly used,' said Mrs. Smiley, 'but I look on it as disrespectful; and seeing the position which I hold as regards John Kenneby, anything disrespectful to him is hurtful to my feelings.'

'All right,' said Moulder. 'And now, John, I'll just tell you what it is. You've no more chance of being allowed to speak freely there than—than—than—no more than if you was in church. What are them fellows paid for if you're to say whatever you pleases out in your own way?'

'He only wants to say the truth, M.,' said Mrs. Moulder, who probably knew less than her husband of the general usages of courts of law.

'Truth be —,' said Moulder.

'Mr. Moulder!' said Mrs. Smiley. 'There's ladies by, if you'll please to remember.'

'To hear such nonsense sets one past oneself,' continued he; 'as if all those lawyers were brought together there—the cleverest and sharpest fellows in the kingdom, mind you—to listen to a man like John here telling his own story in his own way. You'll have to tell your story in their way; that is, in two different ways. There'll be one fellow 'll make you tell it his way first, and another fellow 'll make you tell it again his way afterwards; and its odds but what the first 'll be at you again after that, till you won't know whether you stand on your heels or your head.'

'That can't be right,' said Mrs. Moulder.

'And why can't it be right?' said Moulder. 'They're paid for it; it's their duties; just as it's my duty to sell Hubbles and Grease's sugar. It's not for me to say the sugar's bad, or the samples not equal to the last. My duty is to sell, and I sell;—and it's their duty to get a verdict.'

'But the truth, Moulder —!' said Kenneby.

'Gammon!' said Moulder. 'Begging your pardon, Mrs. Smiley, for making use of the expression. Look you here, John; if you're paid to bring a man off not guilty, won't you bring him off if you can? I've been at trials times upon times, and listened till I've wished from the bottom of my heart that I'd been brought up a barrister. Not that I think much of myself, and I mean of course



with education and all that accordingly. It's beautiful to hear them. You'll see a little fellow in a wig, and he'll get up; and there'll be a man in the box before him,—some swell dressed up to his eyes, who thinks no end of strong beer of himself; and in about ten minutes he'll be as flabby as wet paper, and he'll say—on his oath, mind you,—just anything that that little fellow wants him to say. That's power, mind you, and I call it beautiful.'

'But it aint justice,' said Mrs. Smiley.

'Why not? I say it is justice. You can have it if you choose to pay for it, and so can I. If I buy a greatcoat against the winter, and you go out at night without having one, is it injustice because you're perished by the cold while I'm as warm as a toast? I say it's a grand thing to live in a country where one can buy a greatcoat.'

The argument had got so far, Mr. Moulder certainly having the best of it, when a ring at the outer door was heard.

'Now who on earth is that?' said Moulder.

'Snengkeld, I shouldn't wonder,' said his wife.

'I hope it aint no stranger,' said Mrs. Smiley. 'Situated as John and I are now, strangers is so disagreeable.' And then the door was opened by the maid-servant, and Mr. Kantwise was shown into the room.

'Halloo, Kantwise!' said Mr. Moulder, not rising from his chair, or giving any very decided tokens of welcome. 'I thought you were down somewhere among the iron foundries?'

'So I was, Mr. Moulder, but I came up yesterday. Mrs. Moulder, allow me to have the honour. I hope I see you quite well; but looking at you I need not ask. Mr. Kenneby, sir, your very humble servant. The day's coming on fast; isn't it, Mr. Kenneby? Ma'am, your very obedient. I believe I haven't the pleasure of being acquainted.'

'Mrs. Smiley, Mr. Kantwise. Mr. Kantwise, Mrs. Smiley,' said the lady of the house, introducing her visitors to each other in the appropriate way.

'Quite delighted, I'm sure,' said Kantwise.

'Smiley as is, and Kenneby as will be this day three weeks,' said Moulder; and then they all enjoyed that little joke, Mrs. Smiley by no means appearing bashful in the matter although Mr. Kantwise was a stranger.

'I thought I should find Mr. Kenneby here,' said Kantwise, when the subject of the coming nuptials had been sufficiently discussed, 'and therefore I just stepped in. No intrusion, I hope, Mr. Moulder.'

'All right,' said Moulder; 'make yourself at home. There's the stuff on the table. You know what the tap is.'

'I've just parted from—Mr. Dockwrath,' said Kantwise, speaking in a tone of voice which implied the great importance of the



communication, and looking round the table to see the effect of it upon the circle.

'Then you've parted from a very low-lived party, let me tell you that,' said Moulder. He had not forgotten Dockwrath's conduct in the commercial room at Leeds, and was fully resolved that he never would forgive it.

'That's as may be,' said Kantwise. 'I say nothing on that subject at the present moment, either one way or the other. But I think you'll all agree as to this: that at the present moment Mr. Dockwrath fills a conspicuous place in the public eye.'

'By no means so conspicuous as John Kenneby,' said Mrs. Smiley, 'if I may be allowed in my position to hold an opinion.'

'That's as may be, ma'am. I say nothing about that. What I hold by is, that Mr. Dockwrath does hold a conspicuous place in the public eye. I've just parted with him in Gray's Inn Lane, and he says—that it's all up now with Lady Mason.'

'Gammon!' said Moulder. And on this occasion Mrs. Smiley did not rebuke him. 'What does he know about it more than any one else? Will he bet two to one? Because, if so, I'll take it;—only I must see the money down.'

'I don't know what he'll bet, Mr. Moulder; only he says it's all up with her.'

'Will he back his side, even handed?'

'I aint a betting man, Mr. Moulder. I don't think it's right. And on such a matter as this, touching the liberty and almost life of a lady whom I've had the honour of seeing, and acquainted as I am with the lady of the other party, Mrs. Mason that is of Groby Park, I should rather, if it's no offence to you, decline the subject of—betting.'

'Bother!'

'Now M., in your own house, you know!' said his wife.

'So it is bother. But never mind that. Go on, Kantwise. What is this you were saying about Dockwrath?'

'Oh, that's about all. I thought you would like to know what they were doing,—particularly Mr. Kenneby. I do hear that they mean to be uncommonly hard upon him.'

The unfortunate witness shifted uneasily in his seat, but at the moment said nothing himself.

'Well, now, I can't understand it,' said Mrs. Smiley, sitting upright in her chair, and tackling herself to the discussion as though she meant to express her opinion, let who might think differently. 'How is any one to put words into my mouth if I don't choose to speak then? There's John's waistcoat is silk.' Upon which they all looked at Kenneby's waistcoat, and, with the exception of Kantwise, acknowledged the truth of the assertion.



‘That’s as may be,’ said he, looking round at it from the corner of his eyes.

‘And do you mean to say that all the barristers in London will make me say that it’s made of cloth? It’s ridic’lous—nothing short of ridic’lous.’

‘You’ve never tried, my dear,’ said Moulder.

‘I don’t know about being your dear, Mr. Moulder——’

‘Nor yet don’t I neither, Mrs. Smiley,’ said the wife.

‘Mr. Kenneby’s my dear, and I aint ashamed to own him,—before men and women. But if he allows hisself to be hocussed in that way, I don’t know but what I shall be ashamed. I call it hocussing—just hocussing.’

‘So it is, ma’am,’ said Kantwise, ‘only this, you know, if I hocus you, why you hocus me in return; so it isn’t so very unfair, you know.’

‘Unfair!’ said Moulder. ‘It’s the fairest thing that is. It’s the bulwark of the British Constitution.’

‘What! being badgered and browbeat?’ asked Kenneby, who was thinking within himself that if this were so he did not care if he lived somewhere beyond the protection of that blessed Ægis.

‘Trial by jury is,’ said Moulder. ‘And how can you have trial by jury if the witnesses are not to be cross-questioned?’

To this position no one was at the moment ready to give an answer, and Mr. Moulder enjoyed a triumph over his audience. That he lived in a happy and blessed country Moulder was well aware, and with those blessings he did not wish any one to tamper. ‘Mother,’ said a fastidious child to his parent, ‘the bread is gritty and the butter tastes of turnips.’ ‘Turnips indeed,—and gritty!’ said the mother. ‘Is it not a great thing to have bread and butter at all?’ I own that my sympathies are with the child. Bread and butter is a great thing; but I would have it of the best if that be possible.

After that Mr. Kantwise was allowed to dilate upon the subject which had brought him there. Mr. Dockwrath had been summoned to Bedford Row, and there had held a council of war together with Mr. Joseph Mason and Mr. Matthew Round. According to his own story Mr. Matthew had quite come round and been forced to acknowledge all that Dockwrath had done for the cause. In Bedford Row there was no doubt whatever as to the verdict. ‘That woman Bolster is quite clear that she only signed one deed,’ said Kantwise.

‘I shall say nothing—nothing here,’ said Kenneby.

Quite right, John,’ said Mrs. Smiley. ‘Your feelings on the occasion become you.’

‘I’ll lay an even bet she’s acquitted,’ said Moulder. ‘And I’ll do it in a ten-p’und note.’



## CHAPTER XXII.

### WHAT THE FOUR LAWYERS THOUGHT ABOUT IT.

I HAVE spoken of the state of public opinion as to Lady Mason's coming trial, and have explained that for the most part men's thoughts and sympathies took part with her. But I cannot say that such was the case with the thoughts of those who were most closely concerned with her in the matter,—whatever may have been their sympathies. Of the state of Mr. Furnival's mind on the matter enough has been said. But if he had still entertained any shadow of doubt as to his client's guilt or innocence, none whatever was entertained either by Mr. Aram or by Mr. Chaffanbrass. From the day on which they had first gone into the real circumstances of the case, looking into the evidence which could be adduced against their client, and looking also to their means of rebutting that evidence, they had never felt a shadow of doubt upon the subject. But yet neither of them had ever said that she was guilty. Aram, in discussing with his clerks the work which it was necessary that they should do in the matter, had never expressed such an opinion; nor had Chaffanbrass done so in the consultations which he had held with Aram. As to the verdict they had very often expressed an opinion,—differing considerably. Mr. Aram was strongly of opinion that Lady Mason would be acquitted, resting that opinion, mainly on his great confidence in the powers of Mr. Chaffanbrass. But Mr. Chaffanbrass would shake his head, and sometimes say that things were not now as they used to be.

'That may be so in the City,' said Mr. Aram. 'But you won't find a City jury down at Alston.'

'It's not the juries, Aram. It's the judges. It usedn't to be so, but it is now. When a man has the last word, and will take the trouble to use it, that's everything. If I were asked what point I'd best like to have in my favour, I'd say, a deaf judge. Or if not that, one regularly tired out. I've sometimes thought I'd like to be a judge myself, merely to have the last word.'

'That wouldn't suit you at all, Mr. Chaffanbrass, for you'd be sick of it in a week.'

'At any rate I'm not fit for it,' said the great man meekly. 'I'll tell you what, Aram, I can look back on life and think that I've done a deal of good in my way. I've prevented unnecessary blood-



shed. I've saved the country thousands of pounds in the maintenance of men who've shown themselves well able to maintain themselves. And I've made the Crown lawyers very careful as to what sort of evidence they would send up to the Old Bailey. But my chances of life have been such that they haven't made me fit to be a judge. I know that.'

'I wish I might see you on the bench to-morrow;—only that we shouldn't know what to do without you,' said the civil attorney. It was no more than the fair every-day flattery of the world, for the practice of Mr. Solomon Aram in his profession was quite as surely attained as was that of Mr. Chaffanbrass. And it could hardly be called flattery, for Mr. Solomon Aram much valued the services of Mr. Chaffanbrass, and greatly appreciated the peculiar turn of that gentleman's mind.

The above conversation took place in Mr. Solomon Aram's private room in Bucklersbury. In that much-noted city thoroughfare Mr. Aram rented the first floor of a house over an eating establishment. He had no great paraphernalia of books and boxes and clerks' desks, as are apparently necessary to attorneys in general. Three clerks he did employ, who sat in one room, and he himself sat in that behind it. So at least they sat when they were to be found at the parent establishment; but, as regarded the attorney himself and his senior assistant, the work of their lives was carried on chiefly in the courts of law. The room in which Mr. Aram was now sitting was furnished with much more attention to comfort than is usual in lawyers' chambers. Mr. Chaffanbrass was at present lying, with his feet up, on a sofa against the wall, in a position of comfort never attained by him elsewhere till the after-dinner hours had come to him; and Mr. Aram himself filled an easy lounging-chair. Some few law papers there were scattered on the library table, but none of those piles of dusty documents which give to a stranger, on entering an ordinary attorney's room, so terrible an idea of the difficulty and dreariness of the profession. There were no tin boxes with old names labelled on them; there were no piles of letters, and no pigeon-holes loaded with old memoranda. On the whole Mr. Aram's private room was smart and attractive; though, like himself, it had an air rather of pretence than of steady and assured well-being.

It is not quite the thing for a barrister to wait upon an attorney, and therefore it must not be supposed that Mr. Chaffanbrass had come to Mr. Aram with any view to immediate business; but nevertheless, as the two men understood each other, they could say what they had to say as to this case of Lady Mason's, although their present positions were somewhat irregular. They were both to meet Mr. Furnival and Felix Graham on that afternoon in Mr. Furnival's chambers with reference to the division of those labours



which were to be commenced at Alston on the day but one following, and they both thought that it might be as well that they should say a word to each other on the subject before they went there.

'I suppose you know nothing about the panel down there, eh?' said Chaffanbrass.

'Well, I have made some inquiries; but I don't think there's anything especial to know;—nothing that matters. If I were you, Mr. Chaffanbrass, I wouldn't have any Hamworth people on the jury, for they say that a prophet is never a prophet in his own country.'

'But do you know the Hamworth people?'

'Oh, yes; I can tell you as much as that. But I don't think it will matter much who is or is not on the jury.'

'And why not?'

If those two witnesses break down—that is, Kenneby and Bolster, no jury can convict her. And if they don't——'

'Then no jury can acquit her. But let me tell you, Aram, that it's not every man put into a jury-box who can tell whether a witness has broken down or not.'

'But from what I hear, Mr. Chaffanbrass, I don't think either of these can stand a chance;—that is, if they both come into your hands.'

'But they won't both come into my hands,' said the anxious hero of the Old Bailey.

'Ah! that's where it is. That's where we shall fail. Mr. Funnival is a great man, no doubt.'

'A very great man,—in his way,' said Mr. Chaffanbrass.

'But if he lets one of those two slip through his fingers the thing's over.'

'You know my opinion,' said Chaffanbrass. 'I think it is all over. If you're right in what you say,—that they're both ready to swear in their direct evidence that they only signed one deed on that day, no vacillation afterwards would have any effect on the judge. It's just possible, you know, that their memory might deceive them.'

'Possible! I should think so. I'll tell you what, Mr. Chaffanbrass, if the matter was altogether in your hands I should have no fear,—literally no fear.'

'Ah, you're partial, Aram.'

'It couldn't be so managed, could it, Mr. Chaffanbrass? It would be a great thing; a very great thing.' But Mr. Chaffanbrass said that he thought it could not be managed. The success or safety of a client is a very great thing;—in a professional point of view a very great thing indeed. But there is a matter which in legal eyes is greater even than that. Professional etiquette required that the cross-examination of these two most important witnesses should not be left in the hands of the same barrister.



And then the special attributes of Kenneby and Bridget Bolster were discussed between them, and it was manifest that Aram knew with great accuracy the characters of the persons with whom he had to deal. That Kenneby might be made to say almost anything was taken for granted. With him there would be very great scope for that peculiar skill with which Mr. Chaffanbrass was so wonderfully gifted. In the hands of Mr. Chaffanbrass it was not improbable that Kenneby might be made to swear that he had signed two, three, four—any number of documents on that fourteenth of July, although he had before sworn that he had only signed one. Mr. Chaffanbrass indeed might probably make him say anything that he pleased. Had Kenneby been unsupported the case would have been made safe,—so said Mr. Solomon Aram,—by leaving Kenneby in the hands of Mr. Chaffanbrass. But then Bridget Bolster was supposed to be a witness of altogether a different class of character. To induce her to say exactly the reverse of that which she intended to say might, no doubt, be within the power of man. Mr. Aram thought that it would be within the power of Mr. Chaffanbrass. He thought, however, that it would as certainly be beyond the power of Mr. Furnival; and when the great man lying on the sofa mentioned the name of Mr. Felix Graham, Mr. Aram merely smiled. The question with him was this:—Which would be the safest course?—to make quite sure of Kenneby by leaving him with Chaffanbrass; or to go for the double stake by handing Kenneby over to Mr. Furnival and leaving the task of difficulty to the great master?

‘When so much depends upon it, I do detest all this etiquette and precedence,’ said Aram with enthusiasm. ‘In such a case Mr. Furnival ought not to think of himself.’

‘My dear Aram,’ said Mr. Chaffanbrass, ‘men always think of themselves first. And if we were to go out of the usual course, do you conceive that the gentlemen on the other side would fail to notice it?’

‘Which shall it be then?’

‘I’m quite indifferent. If the memory of either of these two persons is doubtful,—and after twenty years it may be so,—Mr. Furnival will discover it.’

‘Then on the whole I’m disposed to think that I’d let him take the man.’

‘Just as you please, Aram. That is, if he’s satisfied also.’

‘I’m not going to have my client overthrown, you know,’ said Aram. ‘And then you’ll take Dockwrath also, of course. I don’t know that it will have much effect upon the case, but I shall like to see Dockwrath in your hands; I shall indeed.’

‘I doubt he’ll be too many for me.’

‘Ha, ha, ha!’ Aram might well laugh; for when had any



one shown himself able to withstand the powers of Mr. Chaffanbrass?

'They say he is a sharp fellow,' said Mr. Chaffanbrass. 'Well, we must be off. When those gentlemen at the West End get into Parliament it does not do to keep them waiting. Let one of your fellows get a cab.' And then the barrister and the attorney started from Bucklersbury for the general meeting of their forces to be held in the Old Square, Lincoln's Inn.

We have heard how it came to pass that Felix Graham had been induced to become one of that legal phalanx which was employed on behalf of Lady Mason. It was now some days since he had left Noningsby, and those days with him had been very busy. He had never yet undertaken the defence of a person in a criminal court, and had much to learn,—or perhaps he rather fancied that he had. And then that affair of Mary Snow's new lover was not found to arrange itself altogether easily. When he came to the details of his dealings with the different parties, every one wanted from him twice as much money as he had expected. The chemist was very willing to have a partner, but then a partnership in his business was, according to his view of the matter, a peculiarly expensive luxury. Snow père, moreover, came forward with claims which he rested on such various arguments, that Graham found it almost impossible to resist them. At first,—that is immediately subsequent to the interview between him and his patron described in a preceding chapter, Graham had been visited by a very repulsive attorney who had talked loudly about the cruel wrongs of his ill-used client. This phasis of the affair would have been by far the preferable one; but the attorney and his client probably disagreed. Snow wanted immediate money, and as no immediate money was forthcoming through the attorney, he threw himself repentant at Graham's feet, and took himself off with twenty shillings. But his penitence, and his wants, and his tears, and the thwarted ambition of his parental mind were endless; and poor Felix hardly knew where to turn himself without seeing him. It seemed probable that every denizen of the courts of law in London would be told before long the sad tale of Mary Snow's injuries. And then Mrs. Thomas wanted money,—more money than she had a right to want in accordance with the terms of their mutual agreement. 'She had been very much put about,' she said,—'dreadfully put about. She had had to change her servant three times. There was no knowing the trouble Mary Snow had given her. She had, in a great measure, been forced to sacrifice her school.' Poor woman! she thought she was telling the truth while making these false complaints. She did not mean to be dishonest, but it is so easy to be dishonest without meaning it when one is very poor! Mary Snow herself made no claim on her lost lover, no claim for money or for aught besides. When he



parted from her on that day without kissing her, Mary Snow knew that all that was over. But not the less did Graham recognize her claim. The very bonnet which she must wear when she stood before the altar with Fitzallen must be paid for out of Graham's pocket. That hobby of moulding a young lady is perhaps of all hobbies the most expensive to which a young gentleman can apply himself.

And in these days he heard no word from Noningsby. Augustus Staveley was up in town, and once or twice they saw each other. But, as may easily be imagined, nothing was said between them about Madeline. As Augustus had once declared, a man does not talk to his friend about his own sister. And then hearing nothing—as indeed how could he have heard anything?—Graham endeavoured to assure himself that that was all over. His hopes had ran high at that moment when his last interview with the judge had taken place; but after all to what did that amount? He had never even asked Madeline to love him. He had been such a fool that he had made no use of those opportunities which chance had thrown in his way. He had been told that he might fairly aspire to the hand of any lady. And yet when he had really loved, and the girl whom he had loved had been close to him, he had not dared to speak to her! How could he now expect that she, in his absence, should care for him?

With all these little troubles around him he went to work on Lady Mason's case, and at first felt thoroughly well inclined to give her all the aid in his power. He saw Mr. Furnival on different occasions, and did much to charm that gentleman by his enthusiasm in this matter. Mr. Furnival himself could no longer be as enthusiastic as he had been. The skill of a lawyer he would still give if necessary, but the ardour of the loving friend was waxing colder from day to day. Would it not be better, if such might be possible, that the whole affair should be given up to the hands of Chaffanbrass who could be energetic without belief, and of Graham who was energetic because he believed? So he would say to himself frequently. But then he would think again of her pale face and acknowledge that this was impossible. He must go on till the end. But, nevertheless, if this young man could believe, would it not be well that he should bear the brunt of the battle? That fighting of a battle without belief is, I think, the sorriest task which ever falls to the lot of any man.

But, as the day grew nigh, a shadow of unbelief, a dim passing shade—a shade which would pass, and then return, and then pass again—flitted also across the mind of Felix Graham. His theory had been, and still was, that those two witnesses, Kenneby and Bolster, were suborned by Dockwrath to swear falsely. He had commenced by looking at the matter with a full confidence in his client's innocence, a confidence which had come from the outer



world, from his social convictions, and the knowledge which he had of the confidence of others. Then it had been necessary for him to reconcile the stories which Kenneby and Bolster were prepared to tell with this strong confidence, and he could only do so by believing that they were both false and had been thus suborned. But what if they were not false? What if he were judging them wrongfully? I do not say that he had ceased to believe in Lady Mason; but a shadow of doubt would occasionally cross his mind, and give to the whole affair an aspect which to him was very tragical.

He had reached Mr. Furnival's chambers on this day some few minutes before his new allies, and as he was seated there discussing the matter which was now so interesting to them all, he blurted out a question which nearly confounded the elder barrister

'I suppose there can really be no doubt as to her innocence?'

What was Mr. Furnival to say? Mr. Chaffanbrass and Mr. Aram had asked no such question. Mr. Round had asked no such question when he had discussed the whole matter confidentially with him. It was a sort of question never put to professional men, and one which Felix Graham should not have asked. Nevertheless it must be answered.

'Eh?' he said.

'I suppose we may take it for granted that Lady Mason is really innocent,—that is, free from all falsehood or fraud in this matter?'

'Really innocent! Oh yes; I presume we take that for granted, as a matter of course.'

'But you yourself, Mr. Furnival; you have no doubt about it? You have been concerned in this matter from the beginning, and therefore I have no hesitation in asking you.'

But that was exactly the reason why he should have hesitated! At least so Mr. Furnival thought. 'Who; I? No; I have no doubt; none in the least,' said he. And thus the lie which he had been trying to avoid, was at last told.

The assurance thus given was very complete as far as the words were concerned; but there was something in the tone of Mr. Furnival's voice, which did not quite satisfy Felix Graham. It was not that he thought that Mr. Furnival had spoken falsely, but the answer had not been made in a manner to set his own mind at rest. Why had not Mr. Furnival answered him with enthusiasm? Why had he not, on behalf of his old friend, shown something like indignation that any such doubt should have been expressed? His words had been words of assurance; but, considering the subject, his tone had contained no assurance. And thus the shadow of doubt flitted backwards and forwards before Graham's mind.

Then the general meeting of the four lawyers was held, and the various arrangements necessary for the coming contest were settled.



No such impertinent questions were asked then, nor were there any communications between them of a confidential nature. Mr. Chaffanbrass and Solomon Aram might whisper together, as might also Mr. Furnival and Felix Graham; but there could be no whispering when all the four were assembled. The programme of their battle was settled, and then they parted with the understanding that they were to meet again in the court-house at Alston.

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## CHAPTER XXIII.

### THE EVENING BEFORE THE TRIAL.

THE eve of the trial had now come, and still there had been no confidence between the mother and the son. No words of kindness had been spoken with reference to that terrible event which was so near at hand. Lucius had in his manner been courteous to his mother, but he had at the same time been very stern. He had seemed to make no allowance for her sorrows, never saying to her one of those soft words which we all love to hear from those around us when we are suffering. Why should she suffer thus? Had she chosen to lean upon him, he would have borne on her behalf all this trouble and vexation. As to her being guilty—as to her being found guilty by any twelve jurymen in England,—no such idea ever entered his head. I have said that many people had begun to suspect; but no such suspicions had reached his ears. What man, unless it should be some Dockwrath, would whisper to the son the possibility of his mother's guilt? Dockwrath had done more than whisper it; but the words of such a man could have no avail with him against his mother's character.

On that day Mrs. Orme had been with Lady Mason for some hours, and had used all her eloquence to induce the mother even then to divulge her secret to her son. Mrs. Orme had suggested that Sir Peregrine should tell him; she had offered to tell him herself; she had proposed that Lady Mason should write to Lucius. But all had been of no avail. Lady Mason had argued, and had argued with some truth, that it was too late to tell him now, with the view of obtaining from him support during the trial. If he were now told, he would not recover from the first shock of the blow in time to appear in court without showing on his brow the perturbation of his spirit. His terrible grief would reveal the secret to every one. 'When it is over,'—she had whispered at last, as Mrs. Orme continued to press upon her the absolute necessity that Lucius should give up the property,—'when it is over, you shall do it.'



With this Mrs. Orme was obliged to rest contented. She had not the heart to remind Lady Mason how probable it was that the truth might be told out to all the world during the next two or three days;—that a verdict of Guilty might make any further telling unnecessary. And indeed it was not needed that she should do so. In this respect Lady Mason was fully aware of the nature of the ground on which she stood.

Mrs. Orme had sat with her the whole afternoon, only leaving herself time to be ready for Sir Peregrine's dinner; and as she left her she promised to be with her early on the following morning to go with her down to the court. Mr. Aram was also to come to the Farm for her, and a closed carriage had been ordered from the inn for the occasion.

'You won't let him prevent you?' were the last words she spoke, as Mrs. Orme then left her.

'He will not wish to do so,' said Mrs. Orme. 'He has already given me his permission. He never goes back from his word, you know.'

This had been said in allusion to Sir Peregrine. When Mrs. Orme had first proposed to accompany Lady Mason to the court and to sit by her side during the whole trial, he had been much startled. He had been startled, and for a time had been very unwilling to accede to such a step. The place which she now proposed to fill was one which he had intended to fill himself;—but he had intended to stand by an innocent, injured lady, not a perpetrator of midnight forgery. He had intended to support a spotless being, who would then be his wife,—not a woman who for years had lived on the proceeds of fraud and felony, committed by herself!

'Edith,' he had said, 'you know that I am unwilling to oppose you; but I think that in this your feelings are carrying you too far.'

'No, father,' she answered, not giving way at all, or showing herself minded to be turned from her purpose by anything he might say. 'Do not think so; think of her misery. How could she endure it by herself?'

'Think of her guilt, Edith!'

'I will leave others to think of that. But, father, her guilt will not stain me. Are we not bound to remember what injury she might have done to us, and how we might still have been ignorant of all this, had not she herself confessed it—for our sakes—for our sakes, father?'

And then Sir Peregrine gave way. When this argument was used to him, he was forced to yield. It was true that, had not that woman been as generous as she was guilty, he would now have been bound to share her shame. The whole of this affair, taken together, had nearly laid him prostrate; but that which had gone the farthest



towards effecting this ruin, was the feeling that he owed so much to Lady Mason. As regarded the outer world, the injury to him would have been much more terrible had he married her; men would then have declared that all was over with him; but as regards the inner man, I doubt whether he would not have borne that better. It was easier for him to sustain an injury than a favour,—than a favour from one whom his judgment compelled him to disown as a friend.

But he had given way, and it was understood at The Cleeve that Mrs. Orme was to remain by Lady Mason's side during the trial. To the general household there was nothing in this that was wonderful. They knew only of the old friendship. To them the question of her guilt was still an open question. As others had begun to doubt, so had they; but no one then presumed that Sir Peregrine or Mrs. Orme had any doubt. That they were assured of her innocence was the conviction of all Hamworth and its neighbourhood.

'He never goes back from his word, you know,' Mrs. Orme had said; and then she kissed Lady Mason, and went her way. She had never left her without a kiss, had never greeted her without a warm pressure of the hand, since that day on which the secret had been told in Sir Peregrine's library. It would be impossible to describe how great had been the worth of this affection to Lady Mason; but it may almost be said that it had kept her alive. She herself had said but little about it, uttering but few thanks; but not the less had she recognized the value of what had been done for her. She had even become more free herself in her intercourse with Mrs. Orme,—more open in her mode of speech,—had put herself more on an equality with her friend, since there had ceased to be anything hidden between them. Previously Lady Mason had felt, and had occasionally expressed the feeling, that she was hardly fit to associate on equal terms with Mrs. Orme; but now there was none of this,—now, as they sat together for hours and hours, they spoke, and argued, and lived together as though they were equal. But nevertheless, could she have shown her love by any great deed, there was nothing which Lady Mason would not have done for Mrs. Orme.

She was now left alone, and according to her daily custom would remain there till the servant told her that Mr. Lucius was waiting for her in the dining-room. In an early part of this story I have endeavoured to describe how this woman sat alone, with deep sorrow in her heart and deep thought on her mind, when she first learned what terrible things were coming on her. The idea, however, which the reader will have conceived of her as she sat there will have come to him from the skill of the artist, and not from the words of the writer. If that drawing is now near him, let him go



back to it. Lady Mason was again sitting in the same room—that pleasant room, looking out through the verandah on to the sloping lawn, and in the same chair; one hand again rested open on the arm of the chair, while the other supported her face as she leaned upon her elbow; and the sorrow was still in her heart, and the deep thought in her mind. But the lines of her face were altered, and the spirit expressed by it was changed. There was less of beauty, less of charm, less of softness; but in spite of all that she had gone through there was more of strength,—more of the power to resist all that this world could do to her.

It would be wrong to say that she was in any degree a hypocrite. A man is no more a hypocrite because his manner and gait when he is alone are different from those which he assumes in company, than he is for wearing a dressing-gown in the morning, whereas he puts on a black coat in the evening. Lady Mason in the present crisis of her life endeavoured to be true in all her dealings with Mrs. Orme; but nevertheless Mrs. Orme had not yet read her character. As she now sat thinking of what the morrow would bring upon her,—thinking of all that the malice of that man Dockwrath had brought upon her,—she resolved that she would still struggle on with a bold front. It had been brought home to her that he, her son, the being for whom her soul had been imperilled, and all her hopes for this world destroyed,—that he must be told of his mother's guilt and shame. Let him be told, and then let him leave her while his anguish and the feeling of his shame were hot upon him. Should she be still a free woman when this trial was over she would move herself away at once, and then let him be told. But still it would be well—well for his sake, that his mother should not be found guilty by the law. It was still worth her while to struggle. The world was very hard to her, bruising her to the very soul at every turn, allowing her no hope, offering to her no drop of cool water in her thirst. But still for him there was some future career; and that career perhaps need not be blotted by the public notice of his mother's guilt. She would still fight against her foes,—still show to that court, and to the world that would then gaze at her, a front on which guilt should not seem to have laid its hideous, defacing hand.

There was much that was wonderful about this woman. While she was with those who regarded her with kindness she could be so soft and womanly; and then, when alone, she could be so stern and hard! And it may be said that she felt but little pity for herself. Though she recognized the extent of her misery, she did not complain of it. Even in her inmost thoughts her plaint was this,—that he, her son, should be doomed to suffer so deeply for her sin! Sometimes she would utter to that other mother a word of wailing, in that he would not be soft to her; but even in that she did not



mean to complain of him. She knew in her heart of hearts that she had no right to expect such softness. She knew that it was better that it should be as it now was. Had he stayed with her from morn till evening, speaking kind words to her, how could she have failed to tell him? In sickness it may irk us because we are not allowed to take the cool drink that would be grateful; but what man in his senses would willingly swallow that by which his very life would be endangered? It was thus she thought of her son, and what his love might have been to her.

Yes; she would still bear up, as she had borne up at that other trial. She would dress herself with care, and go down into the court with a smooth brow. Men, as they looked at her, should not at once say, 'Behold the face of a guilty woman!' There was still a chance in the battle, though the odds were so tremendously against her. It might be that there was but little to which she could look forward, even though the verdict of the jury should be in her favour; but all that she regarded as removed from her by a great interval. She had promised that Lucius should know all after the trial,—that he should know all, so that the property might be restored to its rightful owner; and she was fully resolved that this promise should be kept. But nevertheless there was a long interval. If she could battle through this first danger,—if by the skill of her lawyers she could avert the public declaration of her guilt, might not the chances of war still take some further turn in her favour? And thus, though her face was pale with suffering and thin with care, though she had realized the fact that nothing short of a miracle could save her,—still she would hope for that miracle.

But the absolute bodily labour which she was forced to endure was so hard upon her! She would dress herself, and smooth her brow for the trial; but that dressing herself, and that maintenance of a smooth brow would impose upon her an amount of toil which would almost overtask her physical strength. O reader, have you ever known what it is to rouse yourself and go out to the world on your daily business, when all the inner man has revolted against work, when a day of rest has seemed to you to be worth a year of life? If she could have rested now, it would have been worth many years of life,—worth all her life. She longed for rest,—to be able to lay aside the terrible fatigue of being ever on the watch. From the burden of that necessity she had never been free since her crime had been first committed. She had never known true rest. She had not once trusted herself to sleep without the feeling that her first waking thought would be one of horror, as the remembrance of her position came upon her. In every word she spoke, in every trifling action of her life, it was necessary that she should ask herself how that word and action



might tell upon her chances of escape. She had striven to be true and honest,—true and honest with the exception of that one deed. But that one deed had communicated its poison to her whole life. Truth and honesty—fair, unblemished truth and open-handed, fearless honesty,—had been impossible to her. Before she could be true and honest it would be necessary that she should go back and cleanse herself from the poison of that deed. Such cleansing is to be done. Men have sinned deep as she had sinned, and, lepers though they have been, they have afterwards been clean. But that task of cleansing oneself is not an easy one;—the waters of that Jordan in which it is needful to wash are scalding hot. The cool neighbouring streams of life's pleasant valleys will by no means suffice.

Since she had been home at Orley Farm she had been very scrupulous as to going down into the parlour both at breakfast and at dinner, so that she might take her meals with her son. She had not as yet omitted this on one occasion, although sometimes the task of sitting through the dinner was very severe upon her. On the present occasion, the last day that remained to her before the trial—perhaps the last evening on which she would ever watch the sun set from those windows, she thought that she would spare herself. ‘Tell Mr. Lucius,’ she said to the servant who came to summon her, ‘that I would be obliged to him if he would sit down without me. Tell him that I am not ill, but that I would rather not go down to dinner!’ But before the girl was on the stairs she had changed her mind. Why should she now ask for this mercy? What did it matter? So she gathered herself up from the chair, and going forth from the room, stopped the message before it was delivered. She would bear on to the end.

She sat through the dinner, and answered the ordinary questions which Lucius put to her with her ordinary voice, and then, as was her custom, she kissed his brow as she left the room. It must be remembered that they were still mother and son, and that there had been no quarrel between them. And now, as she went up stairs, he followed her into the drawing-room. His custom had been to remain below, and though he had usually seen her again during the evening, there had seldom or never been any social intercourse between them. On the present occasion, however, he followed her, and closing the door for her as he entered the room, he sat himself down on the sofa, close to her chair.

‘Mother,’ he said, putting out his hand and touching her arm, ‘things between us are not as they should be.’

She shuddered, not at the touch, but at the words. Things were not as they should be between them. ‘No,’ she said. ‘But I am sure of this, Lucius, that you never had an unkind thought in your heart towards me.’



‘Never, mother. How could I,—to my own mother, who has ever been so good to me? But for the last three months we have been to each other nearly as though we were strangers.’

‘But we have loved each other all the same,’ said she.

‘But love should beget close social intimacy, and above all close confidence in times of sorrow. There has been none such between us.’

What could she say to him? It was on her lips to promise him that such love should again prevail between them as soon as this trial should be over; but the words stuck in her throat. She did not dare to give him so false an assurance. ‘Dear Lucius,’ she said, ‘if it has been my fault, I have suffered for it.’

‘I do not say that it is your fault;—nor will I say that it has been my own. If I have seemed harsh to you, I beg your pardon.’

‘No, Lucius, no; you have not been harsh. I have understood you through it all.’

‘I have been grieved because you did not seem to trust me;—but let that pass now. Mother, I wish that there may be no unpleasant feeling between us when you enter on this ordeal to-morrow.’

‘There is none;—there shall be none.’

‘No one can feel more keenly,—no one can feel so keenly as I do, the cruelty with which you are treated. The sight of your sorrow has made me wretched.’

‘Oh, Lucius!’

‘I know how pure and innocent you are——’

‘No, Lucius, no.’

‘But I say yes; and knowing that, it has cut me to the quick to see them going about a defence of your innocence by quips and quibbles, as though they were struggling for the escape of a criminal.’

‘Lucius!’ And she put her hands up, praying for mercy, though she could not explain to him how terribly severe were his words.

‘Wait a moment, mother. To me such men as Mr. Chaffanbrass and his comrades are odious. I will not, and do not believe that their services are necessary to you——’

‘But, Lucius, Mr. Furnival——’

‘Yes, Mr. Furnival! It is he that has done it all. In my heart I wish that you had never known Mr. Furnival;—never known him as a lawyer that is,’ he added, thinking of his own strong love for the lawyer’s daughter.

‘Do not upbraid me now, Lucius. Wait till it is all over.’

‘Upbraid you! No. I have come to you now that we may be friends. As things have gone so far, this plan of defence must of course be carried on. I will say no more about that. But, mother, I will go into the court with you to-morrow. That support I can



at any rate give you, and they shall see that there is no quarrel between us.'

But Lady Mason did not desire this. She would have wished that he might have been miles away from the court had that been possible. 'Mrs. Orme is to be with me,' she said.

Then again there came a black frown upon his brow,—a frown such as there had often been there of late. 'And will Mrs. Orme's presence make the attendance of your own son improper?'

'Oh, no; of course not. I did not mean that, Lucius.'

'Do you not like to have me near you?' he asked; and as he spoke he rose up, and took her hand as he stood before her.

She gazed for a moment into his face while the tears streamed down from her eyes, and then rising from her chair, she threw herself on to his bosom and clasped him in her arms. 'My boy! my boy!' she said. 'Oh, if you could be near me, and away from this—away from this!'

She had not intended thus to give way, but the temptation had been too strong for her. When she had seen Mrs. Orme and Peregrine together,—when she had heard Peregrine's mother, with words expressed in a joyful tone, affect to complain of the inroads which her son made upon her, she had envied her that joy. 'Oh, if it could be so with me also!' she always thought; and the words too had more than once been spoken. Now at last, in this last moment, as it might be, of her life at home, he had come to her with kindly voice, and she could not repress her yearning.

'Lucius,' she said; 'dearest Lucius! my own boy!' And then the tears from her eyes streamed hot on to his bosom.

'Mother,' he said, 'it shall be so. I will be with you.'

But she was now thinking of more than this—of much more. Was it possible for her to tell him now? As she held him in her arms, hiding her face upon his breast, she struggled hard to speak the word. Then in the midst of that struggle, while there was still something like a hope within her that it might be done, she raised her head and looked up into his face. It was not a face pleasant to look at, as was that of Peregrine Orme. It was hard in its outlines, and perhaps too manly for his age. But she was his mother, and she loved it well. She looked up at it, and raising her hands she stroked his cheeks. She then kissed him again and again, with warm, clinging kisses. She clung to him, holding him close to her, while the sobs which she had so long repressed came forth from her with a violence that terrified him. Then again she looked up into his face with one long wishful gaze; and after that she sank upon the sofa and hid her face within her hands. She had made the struggle, but it had been of no avail. She could not tell him that tale with her own voice.

'Mother,' he said, 'what does this mean? I cannot understand



such grief as this.' But for a while she was quite unable to answer. The flood-gates were at length opened, and she could not restrain the torrent of her sobbings.

'You do not understand how weak a woman can be,' she said at last.

But in truth he understood nothing of a woman's strength. He sat down by her, now and then taking her by the hand when she would leave it to him, and in his way endeavoured to comfort her. All comfort, we may say, was out of the question; but by degrees she again became tranquil. 'It shall be to-morrow as you will have it. You will not object to her being with me also?'

He did object, but he could not say so. He would have much preferred to be the only friend near to her, but he felt that he could not deny her the solace of a woman's aid and a woman's countenance. 'Oh no,' he said, 'if you wish it.' He would have found it impossible to define even to himself the reason for his dislike to any assistance coming from the family of the Ormes; but the feeling was there, strong within his bosom.

'And when this is over, mother, we will go away,' he said. 'If you would wish to live elsewhere, I will sell the property. It will be better perhaps after all that has passed. We will go abroad for a while.'

She could make no answer to this except pressing his hand. Ah, if he had been told—if she had allowed Mrs. Orme to do that kindness for her, how much better for her would it now have been! Sell the property! Ah, me! Were they not words of fearful sound in her ears,—words of terrible import?

'Yes, it shall be so,' she said, putting aside that last proposition of his. 'We will go together to-morrow. Mr. Aram said that he would sit at my side, but he cannot object to your being there between us.' Mr. Aram's name was odious to Lucius Mason. His close presence would be odious to him. But he felt that he could urge nothing against an arrangement that had now become necessary. Mr. Aram, with all his quibbles, had been engaged, and the trial must now be carried through with all the Aram tactics.

After that Lucius left his mother, and took himself out into the dark night, walking up and down on the road between his house and the outer gate, endeavouring to understand why his mother should be so despondent. That she must fear the result of the trial, he thought, was certain, but he could not bring himself to have any such fear. As to any suspicion of her guilt,—no such idea had even for one moment cast a shadow upon his peace of mind.



## CHAPTER XXIV.

### THE FIRST JOURNEY TO ALSTON.

AT that time Sir Richard Leatherham was the Solicitor-general, and he had been retained as leading counsel for the prosecution. It was quite understood by all men who did understand what was going on in the world, that this trial had been in truth instituted by Mr. Mason of Groby with the hope of recovering the property which had been left away from him by his father's will. The whole matter had now been so much discussed, that the true bearings of it were publicly known. If on the former trial Lady Mason had sworn falsely, then there could be no doubt that that will, or the codicil to the will, was an untrue document, and the property would in that case revert to Mr. Mason, after such further legal exertions on the subject as the lawyers might find necessary and profitable. As far as the public were concerned, and as far as the Masons were concerned, it was known and acknowledged that this was another struggle on the part of the Groby Park family to regain the Orley Farm estate. But then the question had become much more interesting than it had been in the days of the old trial, through the allegation which was now made of Lady Mason's guilt. Had the matter gone against her in the former trial, her child would have lost the property, and that would have been all. But the present issue would be very different. It would be much more tragical, and therefore of much deeper interest.

As Alston was so near to London, Sir Richard, Mr. Furnival, Mr. Chaffanbrass, and others, were able to go up and down by train, —which arrangement was at ordinary assizes a great heartsore to the hotel-keepers and owners of lodging-houses in Alston. But on this occasion the town was quite full in spite of this facility. The attorneys did not feel it safe to run up and down in that way, nor did the witnesses. Mr. Aram remained, as did also Mr. Mat Round. Special accommodation had been provided for John Kenneby and Bridget Bolster, and Mr. Mason of Groby had lodgings of his own.

Mr. Mason of Groby had suggested to the attorneys in Bedford Row that his services as a witness would probably be required, but they had seemed to think otherwise. 'We shall not call you,'



Mr. Round had said, 'and I do not suppose that the other side will do so. They can't if they do not first serve you.' But in spite of this Mr. Mason had determined to be at Alston. If it were true that this woman had robbed him ;—if it could be proved that she had really forged a will, and then by crime of the deepest dye taken from him for years that which was his own, should he not be there to see? Should he not be a witness to her disgrace? Should he not be the first to know and feel his own tardy triumph? Pity! Pity for her! When such a word was named to him, it seemed to him as though the speaker were becoming to a certain extent a partner in her guilt. Pity! Yes; such pity as an Englishman who had caught the Nana Sahib might have felt for his victim. He had complained twenty times since this matter had been mooted of the folly of those who had altered the old laws. That folly had probably robbed him of his property for twenty years, and would now rob him of half his revenge. Not that he ever spoke even to himself of revenge. 'Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord.' He would have been as able as any man to quote the words, and as willing. Justice, outraged justice, was his theme. Whom had he ever robbed? To whom had he not paid all that was owing? 'All that have I done from my youth upwards.' Such were his thoughts of himself; and with such thoughts was it possible that he should willingly be absent from Alston during such a trial?

'I really would stay away if I were you,' Mat Round had said to him.

'I will not stay away,' he had replied, with a look black as a thundercloud. Could there really be anything in those suspicions of Dockwrath, that his own lawyer had wilfully thrown him over once, and was now anxious to throw him over again? 'I will not stay away,' he said; and Dockwrath secured his lodgings for him. About this time he was a good deal with Mr. Dockwrath, and almost regretted that he had not followed that gentleman's advice at the commencement of the trial, and placed the management of the whole concern in his hands.

Thus Alston was quite alive on the morning of the trial, and the doors of the court-house were thronged long before they were opened. They who were personally concerned in the matter, whose presence during the ceremony would be necessary, or who had legal connection with the matter in hand, were of course not driven to this tedious manner of obtaining places. Mr. Dockwrath, for instance, did not stand waiting at the door, nor did his friend Mr. Mason. Mr. Dockwrath was a great man as far as this day was concerned, and could command admittance from the doorkeepers and others about the court. But for the outer world, for men and women who were not lucky enough to be lawyers, witnesses, jurymen, or high sheriff, there was no means of hearing and seeing the events of



this stirring day except what might be obtained by exercise of an almost unlimited patience.

There had been much doubt as to what arrangement for her attendance at the court it might be best for Lady Mason to make, and some difficulty too as to who should decide as to these arrangements. Mr. Aram had been down more than once, and had given a hint that it would be well that something should be settled. It had ended in his settling it himself,—he, with the assistance of Mrs. Orme. What would Sir Peregrine have said had he known that on any subject these two had been leagued in council together?

‘She can go from hence in a carriage—a carriage from the inn,’ Mrs. Orme had said.

‘Certainly, certainly; a carriage from the inn; yes. But in the evening, ma’am?’

‘When the trial is over?’ said Mrs. Orme, inquiring from him his meaning.

‘We can hardly expect that it shall be over in one day, ma’am. She will continue to be on bail, and can return home. I will see that she is not annoyed as she leaves the town.’

‘Annoyed?’ said Mrs. Orme.

‘By the people I mean.’

‘Will there be anything of that, sir?’ she asked, turning pale at the idea. ‘I shall be with her, you know.’

‘Through the whole affair, ma’am?’

‘Yes, through the whole affair.’

‘They’ll want to have a look at her of course; but,—Mrs. Orme, we’ll see that you are not annoyed. Yes; she had better come back home the first day. The expense won’t be much; will it?’

‘Oh no,’ said Mrs. Orme. ‘I must return home, you know. How many days will it be, sir?’

‘Well, perhaps two,—perhaps three. It may run on all the week. Of course you know, Mrs. Orme——’

‘Know what?’ she asked.

‘When the trial is over, if—if it should go against us,—then you must return alone.’

And so the matter had been settled, and Mr. Aram himself had ordered the carriage from the inn. Sir Peregrine’s carriage would have been at their disposal,—or rather Mrs. Orme’s own carriage; but she had felt that The Cleeve arms on The Cleeve panels would be out of place in the streets of Hamworth on such an occasion. It would of course be impossible that she should not be recognized in the court, but she would do as little as possible to proclaim her own presence.

When the morning came, the very morning of the terrible day, Mrs. Orme came down early from her room, as it was necessary that she should breakfast two hours before the usual time. She had



said nothing of this to Sir Peregrine, hoping that she might have been able to escape in the morning without seeing him. She had told her son to be there; but when she made her appearance in the breakfast parlour, she found that his grandfather was already with him. She sat down and took her cup of tea almost in silence, for they all felt that on such a morning much speech was impossible for them.

‘Edith, my dear,’ said the baronet, ‘you had better eat something. Think of the day that is before you.’

‘Yes, father, I have,’ said she, and she lifted a morsel of bread to her mouth.

‘You must take something with you,’ said he, ‘or you will be faint in the court. Have you thought how many hours you will be there?’

‘I will see to that,’ said Peregrine, speaking with a stern decision in his voice that was by no means natural to him.

‘Will you be there, Perry?’ said his mother.

‘Of course I shall. I will see that you have what you want. You will find that I will be near you.’

‘But how will you get in, my boy?’ asked his grandfather.

‘Let me alone for that. I have spoken to the sheriff already. There is no knowing what may turn up; so if anything does turn up you may be sure that I am near you.’

Then another slight attempt at eating was made, the cup of tea was emptied, and the breakfast was finished. ‘Is the carriage there, Perry?’ asked Mrs. Orme.

‘Yes; it is at the door.’

‘Good-bye, father; I am so sorry to have disturbed you.’

‘Good-bye, Edith; God bless you, and give you strength to bear it. And, Edith——’

‘Sir?’ and she held his hand as he whispered to her.

‘Say to her a word of kindness from me;—a word of kindness. Tell her that I have forgiven her, but tell her also that man’s forgiveness will avail her nothing.’

‘Yes, father, I will.’

‘Teach her where to look for pardon. But tell her all the same that I have forgiven her.’

And then he handed her into the carriage. Peregrine, as he stood aside, had watched them as they whispered, and to his mind also as he followed them to the carriage a suspicion of what the truth might be now made its way. Surely there would be no need of all this solemn mourning if she were innocent. Had she been esteemed as innocent, Sir Peregrine was not the man to believe that any jury of his countrymen could find her guilty. Had this been the reason for that sudden change,—for that breaking off of the intended marriage? Even Peregrine, as he went down the steps



after his mother, had begun to suspect the truth; and we may say that he was the last within all that household who did so. During the last week every servant at The Cleeve had whispered to her fellow-servant that Lady Mason had forged the will.

‘I shall be near you, mother,’ said Peregrine as he put his hand into the carriage; ‘remember that. The judge and the other fellows will go out in the middle of the day to get a glass of wine: I’ll have something for both of you near the court.’

Poor Mrs. Orme as she pressed her son’s hand felt much relieved by the assurance. It was not that she feared anything, but she was going to a place that was absolutely new to her,—to a place in which the eyes of many would be fixed on her,—to a place in which the eyes of all would be fixed on the companion with whom she would be joined. Her heart almost sank within her as the carriage drove away. She would be alone till she reached Orley Farm, and there she would take up not only Lady Mason, but Mr. Aram also. How would it be with them in that small carriage while Mr. Aram was sitting opposite to them? Mrs. Orme by no means regretted this act of kindness which she was doing, but she began to feel that the task was not a light one. As to Mr. Aram’s presence in the carriage, she need have been under no uneasiness. He understood very well when his presence was desirable, and also when it was not desirable.

When she arrived at the door of Orley Farm house she found Mr. Aram waiting there to receive her. ‘I am sorry to say,’ said he, raising his hat, ‘that Lady Mason’s son is to accompany us.’

‘She did not tell me,’ said Mrs. Orme, not understanding why this should make him sorry.

‘It was arranged between them last night, and it is very unfortunate. I cannot explain this to her; but perhaps——’

‘Why is it unfortunate, sir?’

‘Things will be said which—which—which would drive me mad if they were said about my mother.’ And immediately there was a touch of sympathy between the high-bred lady and the Old Bailey Jew lawyer.

‘Yes, yes,’ said Mrs. Orme. ‘It will be dreadful.’

‘And then if they find her guilty! It may be so, you know. And how is he to sit there and hear the judge’s charge;—and then the verdict, and the sentence. If he is there he cannot escape. I’ll tell you what, Mrs. Orme; he should not be there at all.’

But what could she do? Had it been possible that she should be an hour alone with Lady Mason, she would have explained all this to her,—or if not all, would have explained much of it. But now, with no minutes to spare, how could she make this understood?

‘But all that will not come to-day, will it, sir?’

‘Not all,—not the charge or the verdict. But he should not be



there even to-day. He should have gone away; or if he remained at home, he should not have shown himself out of the house.'

But this was too late now, for as they were still speaking Lady Mason appeared at the door, leaning on her son's arm. She was dressed from head to foot in black, and over her face there was a thick black veil. Mr. Aram spoke no word further as she stepped up the steps from the hall door to the carriage, but stood back, holding the carriage-door open in his hand. Lucius merely bowed to Mrs. Orme as he assisted his mother to take her place; and then following her, he sat himself down in silence opposite to them. Mr. Aram, who had carefully arranged his own programme, shut the door, and mounted on to the box beside the driver.

Mrs. Orme had held out her own hand, and Lady Mason having taken it, still held it after she was seated. Then they started, and for the first mile no word was spoken between them. Mrs. Orme was most anxious to speak, if it might only be for the sake of breaking the horrid stillness of their greeting; but she could think of no word which it would be proper on such an occasion to say, either to Lucius, or even before him. Had she been alone with Lady Mason there would have been enough of words that she could have spoken. Sir Peregrine's message was as a burden upon her tongue till she could deliver it; but she could not deliver it while Lucius Mason was sitting by her.

Lady Mason herself was the first to speak. 'I did not know yesterday that Lucius would come,' she said, 'or I should have told you.'

'I hope it does not inconvenience you,' he said.

'Oh no; by no means.'

'I could not let my mother go out without me on such an occasion as this. But I am grateful to you, Mrs. Orme, for coming also.'

'I thought it would be better for her to have some lady with her,' said Mrs. Orme.

'Oh yes, it is better—much better.' And then no further word was spoken by any of them till the carriage drove up to the court-house door. It may be hoped that the journey was less painful to Mr. Aram than to the others, seeing that he solaced himself on the coach-box with a cigar.

There was still a great crowd round the front of the court-house when they reached it, although the doors were open, and the court was already sitting. It had been arranged that this case—the great case of the assize—should come on first on this day, most of the criminal business having been completed on that preceding; and Mr. Aram had promised that his charge should be forthcoming exactly at ten o'clock. Exactly at ten the carriage was driven up to the door, and Mr. Aram jumping from his seat directed certain



policemen and sheriff's servants to make a way for the ladies up to the door, and through the hall of the court-house. Had he lived in Alston all his life, and spent his days in the purlieus of that court, he could not have been more at home or have been more promptly obeyed.

'And now I think we may go in,' he said, opening the door and letting down the steps with his own hands.

At first he took them into a small room within the building, and then bustled away himself into the court. 'I shall be back in half a minute,' he said; and in half a dozen half-minutes he was back. 'We are all ready now, and shall have no trouble about our places. If you have anything to leave,—shawls, or things of that sort,—they will be quite safe here: Mrs. Hitcham will look after them.' And then an old woman who had followed Mr. Aram into the room on the last occasion curtsied to them. But they had nothing to leave, and their little procession was soon made.

Lucius at first offered his arm to his mother, and she had taken it till she had gone through the door into the hall. Mr. Aram also had, with some hesitation, offered his arm to Mrs. Orme; but she, in spite of that touch of sympathy, had managed, without speaking, to decline it. In the hall, however, when all the crowd of gazers had turned their eyes upon them and was only kept off from pressing on them by the policemen and sheriff's officers, Lady Mason remembered herself, and suddenly dropping her son's arm, she put out her hand for Mrs. Orme. Mr. Aram was now in front of them, and thus they two followed him into the body of the court. The veils of both of them were down; but Mrs. Orme's veil was not more than ordinarily thick, and she could see everything that was around her. So they walked up through the crowded way, and Lucius followed them by himself.

They were very soon in their seats, the crowd offering them no impediment. The judge was already on the bench,—not our old acquaintance Justice Staveley, but his friend and colleague Baron Maltby. Judge Staveley was sitting in the other court. Mrs. Orme and Lady Mason soon found themselves seated on a bench, with a slight standing desk before them, much as though they were seated in a narrow pew. Up above them, on the same seat, were the three barristers employed on Lady Mason's behalf; nearest to the judge was Mr. Furnival; then came Felix Graham, and below him sat Mr. Chaffanbrass, somewhat out of the line of precedence, in order that he might more easily avail himself of the services of Mr. Aram. Lucius found himself placed next to Mr. Chaffanbrass, and his mother sat between him and Mrs. Orme. On the bench below them, immediately facing a large table which was placed in the centre of the court, sat Mr. Aram and his clerk.

Mrs. Orme as she took her seat was so confused that she could



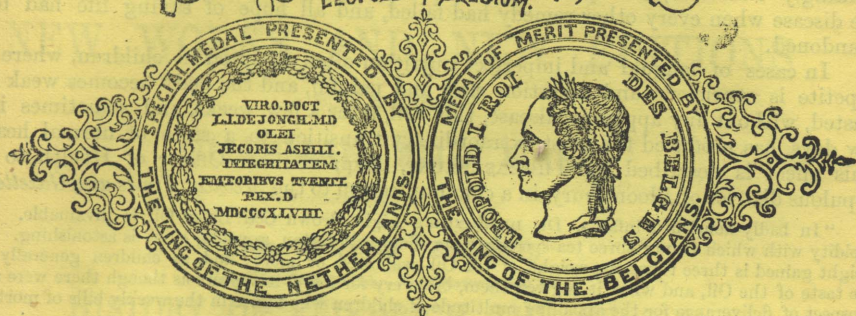
hardly look around her; and it may be imagined that Lady Mason must have suffered at any rate as much in the same way. But they who were looking at her—and it may be said that every one in the court was looking at her—were surprised to see that she raised her veil as soon as she was seated. She raised her veil, and never lowered it again till she left the court, and repassed out into the hall. She had thought much of this day,—even of the little incidents which would occur,—and she was aware that her identification would be necessary. Nobody should tell her to unveil herself, nor would she let it be thought that she was afraid to face her enemies. So there she sat during the whole day, bearing the gaze of the court.

She had dressed herself with great care. It may be said of most women who could be found in such a situation, that they would either give no special heed to their dress on such a morning, or that they would appear in garments of sorrow studiously unbecoming and lachrymose, or that they would attempt to outface the world, and have appeared there in bright trappings, fit for happier days. But Lady Mason had dressed herself after none of these fashions. Never had her clothes been better made, or worn with a better grace; but they were all black, from her bonnet-ribbon down to her boot, and were put on without any attempt at finery or smartness. As regards dress, she had never looked better than she did now; and Mr. Furnival, when his eye caught her as she turned her head round towards the judge, was startled by the grace of her appearance. Her face was very pale, and somewhat hard; but no one on looking at it could say that it was the countenance of a woman overcome either by sorrow or by crime. She was perfect mistress of herself, and as she looked round the court, not with defiant gaze, but with eyes half raised, and a look of modest but yet conscious intelligence, those around her hardly dared to think that she could be guilty.

As she thus looked her gaze fell on one face that she had not seen for years, and their eyes met. It was the face of Joseph Mason of Groby, who sat opposite to her; and as she looked at him her own countenance did not quail for a moment. Her own countenance did not quail; but his eyes fell gradually down, and when he raised them again she had averted her face.



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